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**Parental Mediation of Television: Test of a German-speaking scale and findings on  
the Impact of parental attitudes, sociodemographic and Family factors in  
German-speaking Switzerland**

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**Abstract:** In the present study a German-speaking scale for measuring parental mediation of television is tested and various factors influencing television mediation are investigated. 252 German-speaking Swiss parents of children aged 3 to 14 answered questions about their mediation behavior and possible determinants. The results confirm international research findings. Active and restrictive mediation as well as covieing are identified as important mediation styles in German-speaking Switzerland. Though in detail the mediation styles show different determinant patterns, altogether parental attitudes toward television, family interaction patterns, and children's age prove to be central determinants of television mediation styles. Sociodemographic and structural factors seem to become less important.

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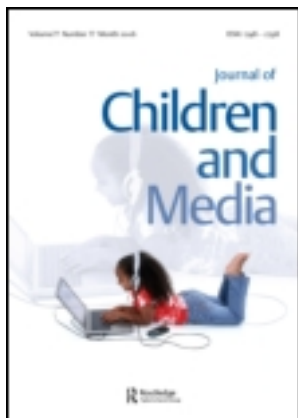
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# PARENTAL MEDIATION OF TELEVISION

## Test of a German-speaking scale and findings on the impact of parental attitudes, sociodemographic and family factors in German-speaking Switzerland

**Saskia Böcking and Tabea Böcking**

*In the present study a German-speaking scale for measuring parental mediation of television is tested and various factors influencing television mediation are investigated. 252 German-speaking Swiss parents of children aged 3 to 14 answered questions about their mediation behavior and possible determinants. The results confirm international research findings. Active and restrictive mediation as well as covieing are identified as important mediation styles in German-speaking Switzerland. Though in detail the mediation styles show different determinant patterns, altogether parental attitudes toward television, family interaction patterns, and children's age prove to be central determinants of television mediation styles. Sociodemographic and structural factors seem to become less important.*

**KEYWORDS** active mediation; children; covieing; influencing factors; instructive mediation; parental mediation styles; restrictive mediation; scale development; television

Even in times of new media, television remains the medium most liked by children and, due to its potential for negative effects, most feared by mothers in German-speaking Europe (Feierabend & Rathgeb, 2006). Vast research on parental mediation of children's television usage has been conducted that has not only centered on general descriptions of television mediation (e.g. Bybee, Robinson, & Turow, 1982), but also on its determinants (e.g. Austin, Bolls, Fujioka, & Engelbertson, 1999; Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters, & Marseille, 1999) and (at least in the US) on its effects on children's development and socialization (e.g. Nathanson & Cantor, 2000). The majority of such investigations (mostly dominated by a quantitative research paradigm) has been conducted in the US and The Netherlands. In German-speaking Europe, qualitative studies (e.g. Neumann-Braun, Charlton, & Roesler, 1993) and studies combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Hurrelmann, Hammer, & Stelberg, 1996; Schorb & Theunert, 2001) outnumber the quantitative studies. However, standardized measures are required in order to systematically analyze the effects of parental mediation of television on children's processing, understanding, and learning of televised content. Although some investigations conducted in Germany or Switzerland do contain measures regarding parental mediation of television (e.g. Schorb & Theunert, 2001; Süss, 2004), the questions and items used are neither standardized nor reliable. The present study aims at testing a standardized instrument for measuring parental mediation of

television which can be applied in research in German-speaking Europe. A second goal of the investigation is to provide up-to-date data on television mediation of German-speaking Swiss parents. In this context, the importance of various determinants of parental mediation is also systematically tested.

### Parental Mediation of Television

According to international research there are three mediation styles: restrictive mediation, active or instructive mediation, and coviewing (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Buerkel, 2001; Valkenburg et al., 1999). Restrictive mediation, also called restrictive guidance (Bybee et al., 1982; van der Voort, Nikken, & von Lil, 1992), encompasses parental behavior constraining children's television usage, such as limiting a child's viewing time or restricting the content they are allowed to watch. Parents' activities and explanations which give children a better understanding of television content are called active or instructive mediation.<sup>1</sup> Such explanations can also imply appraisals of the content. Referring to this, Austin et al. (1999) differentiate between categorization, validation, and supplementation. Categorization means that parents classify television content as real or not real. Validation refers to (dis-)approval of televised portrayals by the child's parents. Supplementation is further information that sheds light on the content's usefulness. The understanding of active mediation developed by Valkenburg et al. (1999) mainly refers to the aspects called categorization and validation by Austin et al., i.e. the discussion of television content by parent and child. Finally, coviewing means that parents and children watch television together. Some researchers assume that children watch programs selected by their parents together with them (Bybee et al., 1982). Others regard shared television usage by parents and children as the result of shared interests and motives (Valkenburg et al., 1999). As coviewing can come along with active mediation, the line between both is not always drawn clearly (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Buerkel, 2001). The best way to distinguish active mediation and coviewing is to follow the differentiation by Valkenburg et al., which has been empirically validated. In contrast to active mediation, coviewing is not based on parents' intention. It occurs accidentally (Dorr, Kovaric, & Doubleday, 1989).

Recent investigations conducted in the US reveal that active mediation is the form of mediation applied most frequently by parents, followed by coviewing (Austin et al., 1999), and restrictive mediation respectively (Warren, Gerke, & Kelly, 2002). Parents more frequently tell their children which things they do not like in a program than which things they agree on (Austin et al., 1999; Fujioka & Austin, 2003). The reason for this behavior can be seen in the fact that affirmative comments are only an expansion of everyday life conversation and therefore occur rather by accident than intentionally. In contrast, hints on contorted or even false content are the outcome of a critical attitude and parents' wish to protect the child (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001). Similar results can be found for The Netherlands, though parents here prefer coviewing to active mediation (Valkenburg et al., 1999). Altogether, parents indicate to frequently use these forms of television mediation. A similar pattern can be observed in German-speaking Europe (e.g. Schorb & Theunert, 2001; Süß, 2004).

Parents do not use active and restrictive mediation and coviewing exclusively. Correlation analyses reveal close connections between the three mediation styles. The more parents set rules for children's television viewing, the more they also discuss the

content with them and the more they watch television together. The strongest connection is found between active and restrictive mediation as well as between active mediation and covieing (Lin & Atkin, 1989; Valkenburg et al., 1999). The latter correlation is due to the fact that watching television together with the child is a prerequisite for parents' explanations. Indeed, watching television together does not automatically imply that parents explain things to their child or criticize televised behavior. However, their sheer presence makes active mediation more probable, even if it does not necessarily happen. Parents often watch television together with a child due to a shared interest in a program instead of the requirement to mediate actively. This holds especially true for older children (Kotler, Wright, & Huston, 2001). Additionally, parents' comments when covieing with a child are mostly positive in nature, i.e. parents signal the child their endorsement of the program (Austin et al., 1999).

### Factors Influencing Parental Mediation of Television

In international research a series of factors has been identified which influence parental mediation of television. They span three fields: sociodemography of the parents and the child, structural and social surroundings of the family, and factors influencing parental behavior itself.<sup>2</sup>

Concerning sociodemographical factors, some studies demonstrate that higher educated parents use restrictive and active mediation more than less educated ones (e.g. Valkenburg et al., 1999). Warren et al. (2002) proved covieing and parental education to be negatively correlated. In general, such results are explained in that those higher educated parents worry more about possible negative outcomes of television on their child and therefore use more restrictions and explanations. However, other investigations show no (Austin, Knaus, & Meneguelli, 1997) or even negative correlations (Lin & Atkin, 1989) between parental education and television mediation. Decisive for television mediation are also a child's age and sex. Restrictive and active mediation are more common with younger children (e.g. Atkin, Greenberg, & Baldwin, 1991; Valkenburg et al., 1999). However, concerning restrictive mediation, those relations disappear if parents' attitudes toward television are also taken into account (Valkenburg et al., 1999; Warren et al., 2002). Covieing increases with children's age (Austin et al., 1999). Recent results from Germany, however, indicate a nonlinear relationship between covieing and age (Schorb & Theunert, 2001). This might be explained by the fact that normally parents do not watch child-directed programs together with the child (Dorr et al., 1989). Results are contradictory regarding children's sex. Some studies demonstrate girls to be more restricted in their television usage than boys (Gross & Walsh, 1980; Sneegas & Plank, 1998). Others prove the contrary (Abelman, 1987) or do not find any relation (Valkenburg et al., 1999). The more restricted television usage of girls is attributed to parents perceiving girls as more vulnerable and therefore more in need of protection. Overall, results concerning the influence of sociodemographic factors are inconsistent. Because of small effect sizes, the general value of those factors is mistrusted (Austin et al., 1997; Warren et al., 2002).

Structural and social surroundings of the family also influence parental mediation. Kuchenbuch and Simon (2006), for example, prove the importance of parents' role model for children's activities in general. They demonstrate that children perform especially those activities which their parents prefer. This also holds true for media and television usage.

This behavior cannot only be explained by parents' direct modeling, but also by the fact that even their way of handling media is influenced by their preferences and interests. This is reflected in an appropriate mediation behavior. Other investigations also prove the importance of parents' television usage. The more time parents spend in front of television, the more children do, too (Süss, 2004). It is also well proven that children with a television set in their bedroom watch more than children without one (e.g. Jordan, Hersey, McDivitt, & Heitzler, 2006; Wiecha, Sobol, Peterson, & Gortmaker, 2001). It is assumed that the increased amount of time children with their own television set devote to watching television is a result of few opportunities for parents to control the child. The reverse connection is also plausible. Children with a television set in their bedroom are restricted less in watching television. The more television sets are available in a household, the less parents and child watch together (e.g. Jordan et al., 2006), as more television sets give family members the opportunity to watch television without considering other family members. The family structure also impacts television mediation. Siblings influence each other not only in when to watch, but also in what and how long for (Piñon, Huston, & Wright, 1989). This also has implications for television mediation (Atkin et al., 1991; Hurrelmann et al., 1996). Single parents display different mediation behavior than nonsingle parents. Various investigations demonstrate that single parents who are employed exert less influence on children's television or VCR usage than families with a nonworking father or mother (Brown, Childers, Bauman, & Koch, 1990; Lin & Atkin, 1989). Obviously, the latter ones have more possibilities to devote time to their children (Warren et al., 2002).

Various investigations proved the influence of parents' positive and negative attitudes toward television on television mediation. Negative attitudes result in more active and restrictive mediation, positive ones in more active mediation and more coviewing (Austin et al., 1999; Warren et al., 2002). It is demonstrated that parents' fear of television's harmful influences on children is one of the main reasons for television mediation (Valkenburg et al., 1999; Warren et al., 2002). Thus, parents' ideas that guide their behavior are of great importance for television mediation. Besides parental attitudes toward television, family interaction patterns proved to be an important determinant of television mediation (for an overview, see Buerkel-Rothfuss & Buerkel, 2001). This is based on the assumption that the family atmosphere significantly influences face-to-face communication and social interactions of family members, and thus parental mediation of television. Buerkel-Rothfuss and Buerkel (2001) point out that heightened communication among family members in general might result in a heightened communication during coviewing, especially about television. Various investigations demonstrate that parent-child interaction that is characterized by openness, but at the same time possesses a certain amount of cohesion, promotes parental mediation of television (e.g. Lull, 1982; Messaris & Kerr, 1983). Similarly, parental involvement, i.e. the amount of time parents spend at home and together with their child, influences television mediation (Warren et al., 2002). The higher parental involvement, the more restrictions parents set on their children and the more they discuss television content with them. Slightly differing, coviewing is only facilitated by the amount of time parents spend at home, but not by the time they effectively spend with the child. The reasoning behind these connections is the more time parents spend with their child, the more possibilities they have to do things with or for the child—including television mediation (Warren et al., 2002).

## Measuring Parental Mediation of Television in German-speaking Countries

In Germany and German-speaking Switzerland, television mediation has so far been measured using both guided interviews (e.g. Schorb & Theunert, 2001) and standardized questions (e.g. Feierabend & Rathgeb, 2006; Frey-Vor & Schumacher, 2004; Schorb & Theunert, 2001; Süß, 2004). However, some of these standardized instruments use only a few questions that are not very detailed (e.g. Feierabend & Rathgeb, 2006; Süß, 2004). Though other instruments allow for a more detailed insight into television mediation (Frey-Vor & Schumacher, 2004), they do not ask for the frequency with which parents apply the different styles, but rather for parents' agreement with them. Altogether, a uniform and reliable instrument for measuring parental mediation in German-speaking Europe which can also be used in experimental designs or surveys for investigating short- and long-term effects of television mediation has so far been lacking. Unreliable scales lead to weakened effect sizes and, thus, to less convincing results (Cronbach, 1990). Nonuniform questions, in turn, make it more difficult to compare the results of investigations. Having already systematically tested existing items of television mediation, Valkenburg et al. (1999) provided standardized reliable scales for the Anglo-American language area. Of all existing instruments for measuring parental mediation of television, this scale is the most theoretically grounded and empirically tested. Therefore, the German-speaking instrument for measuring television mediation tested in the present investigation is based on the items provided by Valkenburg and colleagues. The first research question of this study asks:

RQ1: Is it possible to replicate the television mediation styles identified by Valkenburg and colleagues for German-speaking Switzerland?

The review of relevant previous work has shown that television mediation is well investigated in the US, The Netherlands, and to a certain extent in Germany. However, this does not apply for German-speaking Switzerland. The results here are outdated and suffer from incompleteness of the mediation styles taken into account; measurement quality is low. Additionally, studies investigating the connections between television mediation styles for German-speaking Switzerland are lacking. Therefore, the second research question asks:

RQ2: How often do German-speaking Swiss parents apply the identified mediation styles and what are the connections between them?

Parents' and children's sociodemography, structural and social surroundings of the family, parents' television attitudes, and family interaction patterns have proven to influence parental mediation of television. The latter two are factors influencing parental behavior; the others can be characterized as sociodemographic and family factors. Studies that systematically compare the influence of these determinants are missing for German-speaking Switzerland. Therefore, the third research question is:

RQ3: Which sociodemographic and family factors and factors impacting parental behavior influence the identified mediation styles in which way?

Previous results suggest that parental attitudes toward television are central determinants of their mediations styles. This hypothesis therefore assumes:



- H1: Parents' attitudes toward television influence parents' mediation styles more than the sociodemography of the parents and the child, structural and social surroundings of the family, and family interaction patterns.

## Method

Using standardized questionnaires in face-to-face interviews, 252 German-speaking Swiss parents of children aged 3 to 14 were asked to report on their television mediation behavior as well as on the amount of children's television viewing, structural and social surroundings of the family, parents' television attitudes, and family interaction patterns. To get valid results for television mediation behavior of German-speaking Swiss parents of children aged 3 to 14, respondents were recruited using a quota sample. Based on current demographic data of the Swiss Bundesamt für Statistik, fourteen trained interviewers received combined quotes on children's sex and age as well as on parents' education. These characteristics have been demonstrated to be important for parental mediation of television (Austin et al., 1999; Valkenburg et al., 1999) and for the amount of children's television viewing respectively (Forschungsdienst SRG SSR, 2004), which in turn might influence parental mediation behavior (Nathanson, 1999). Interviews took place from February to March 2005 at respondents' homes. Interviewers were instructed to interview the mother of the child if possible. Interviews lasted between 25 and 60 minutes.

## Respondents

Given quotas concerning children's age and sex could be met: 22.6% of the children are between 3 and 5 years old, 43.3% between 6 and 10 years, and 34.1% between 11 and 14 years; 49.6% of the children are boys, 50.4% girls. However, well educated parents are slightly overrepresented in the current sample. Responding parents live in fifteen of the twenty German-speaking cantons of Switzerland; 48% of the respondents live in villages (<10,000 residents), 14% in small towns (10,000–20,000 residents), 11% in bigger towns (20,000–100,000 residents), and 27% in big cities (>100,000 residents).

## Measures

*Parental mediation of television* As it is one main goal of the current study to test the television mediation items developed by Valkenburg et al. (1999) in German-speaking Europe, these items have been adopted and translated into German. The measure by Valkenburg et al. consists of five items for each active mediation, restrictive mediation, and covieing (see Table 1 for all items applied in the current investigation). Questions concerning restrictive mediation ask for parents' restriction of amount of time and content watched by their child. Questions regarding active mediation refer to explanations of, for example, characters' motives, meaning of scenes depicted on television, moral appraisals, and help for understanding in general. Covieing-items contain statements which indicate joint television viewing of parents and children due to shared motives.

Additionally, further statements which have been used in international research on parental mediation of television have been applied. In this way it shall be tested if the items identified by Valkenburg et al. (1999) are the ones best suited for measuring television



**TABLE 1**  
Factor solution (principal component analysis, oblique rotation), means and standard deviations of mediation items

How often do you ...	M	SD	Factor 1 Active Mediation	Factor 2 Coviewing	Factor 3 Restrictive Mediation
... point out why some things actors do are bad? <sup>a</sup>	3.49	1.06	.953		
... explain the motives of TV characters? <sup>a</sup>	3.15	1.03	.831		
... explain what something on TV really means? <sup>a</sup>	3.35	0.98	.808		
... point out why some things actors do are good? <sup>a</sup>	3.34	1.01	.742		
... try to help the child understand what she/he sees on TV? <sup>a</sup>	3.78	0.97	.731		
... tell your child that something on TV is not real? <sup>b</sup>	3.56	1.07	.708		
... point out that the language of a TV program is bad? <sup>c</sup>	3.36	1.18	.685		
... tell your child more about something you've seen on TV? <sup>b</sup>	3.29	0.92	.530		
... tell your child that you agree with something you've seen on TV? <sup>b</sup>	3.37	0.99	.480	.812	
... watch together because of a common interest in a program? <sup>a</sup>	3.39	1.01		.794	
... watch together just for fun? <sup>a</sup>	3.28	0.96		.765	
... watch together because you both like a program? <sup>a</sup>	3.31	1.02		.674	
... laugh with your child about the things you see on TV? <sup>a</sup>	3.82	0.90		.591	
... watch your favorite program together? <sup>a</sup>	2.38	1.22			.792
... forbid your child to watch certain programs? <sup>a</sup>	4.10	1.12			.763
... restrict the amount of child viewing? <sup>a</sup>	4.40	0.90			.668
... specify in advance the programs that may be watched? <sup>a</sup>	3.41	1.33			.646
... set specific viewing hours for your child? <sup>a</sup>	3.73	1.26			.582
... tell your child to turn off TV when she/he is watching an unsuitable program? <sup>a</sup>	4.44	0.95			1.23
Eigenvalue			7.01	2.72	
Variance explained by each factor			36.9%	14.34%	6.49%

Note. N = 252. Acceptability of sample for factor analysis according to KMO > .90. To enhance readability factor loadings < .40 are not reported. The following items are not reported because of factor loadings < .40 on all factors: " ... watch television together with your child?<sup>ab</sup>". The following items are not reported due to high double loadings: " ... tell your child that the behavior of a protagonist is not OK?<sup>c</sup>". The following items have been eliminated as they were not interpretable on the factor they loaded on: " ... tell your child not to imitate certain phrases you hear in TV?<sup>c</sup>" and " ... forbid programs with bad language?<sup>c</sup>". High scores indicate a more frequent behavior with answers ranging from 1 ("never") to 5 ("always").

<sup>a</sup> Item adopted from Valkenburg et al. (1999). <sup>b</sup> Item adopted from Austin et al. (1999). <sup>c</sup> New item.

mediation in German-speaking Switzerland. Due to the request by Austin et al. (1999) to also imply confirming mediation behavior, the item "How often do you tell your child that you agree with something you've seen on TV?" has been added to the item pool of active mediation items. Two more items asking about the frequency of parents telling children more about the things watched on television and the realism of the content have been borrowed from Austin et al. Additionally, parents' corrective statements regarding bad language on television as well as regarding inappropriate behavior of protagonists have been added to the item pool. One more item for measuring restrictive mediation has been formulated: "How often do you forbid programs with bad language?" For coviewing, one general statement has been added which asks about the frequency of parents coviewing television with their child. It has also been used in various investigations (e.g. Austin et al., 1999; Schorb & Theunert, 2001). Following Valkenburg et al., parents were asked to indicate the frequency of the mediation behaviors. However, instead of the four-point scale used by Valkenburg et al., a five-point scale (from "never" to "always") has been applied to increase the variance of answers.

*Sociodemographic and family factors* Data on structural and social surroundings of the family has been collected asking parents for their child's age and sex, number of siblings, television access, availability of pay-TV, number of television sets in household and in the child's bedroom, number of parents, and parents' education. On average, children of respondents have 1.19 siblings ( $SD = 0.85$ ); 18% of the children are the only child. Most families consist of parents with two children (52%). A quarter of the families of the current investigation have three children, 6% have four or more children. Twelve percent of the respondents are a single mother or father. Families are well-appointed with television sets. Two of three households have one television set, about a quarter has two, and 6% has three television sets ( $M = 1.28$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ). Eight percent of the children have a TV set in their bedroom. Almost all households (96%) receive television via cable or satellite, less than 1% digitally. Only 3% of the respondents' households still have terrestrial access. Pay-TV is not widely spread among German-speaking families in Switzerland; only 4% of the families have a pay-TV subscription. As variance is limited in terms of access to television and availability of pay-TV, both variables have to be excluded from further analysis. Parents' modeling has been surveyed by asking for the amount of time the responding parent watched television the day before (in minutes;  $M = 76$ ,  $SD = 71$ ).

*Parental attitudes toward television* In accordance with previous research (e.g. Austin et al., 1999; Valkenburg et al., 1999), parents' attitudes toward television content was measured asking for their concern about negative effects of television on their child, as well as for possible positive effects of television on children in general. These consist of seven items regarding the two issues of which Swiss parents are most afraid: violent and sexual content (Süss, 2004) (e.g. "How concerned are you that watching what you consider inappropriate programs would ... encourage your child to think violence is an acceptable way to solve problems?" and "... will teach your child prematurely about sexual matters?"). Two further items tap parents' concerns of television induced fright (e.g. "How concerned are you that watching what you consider inappropriate programs would frighten your child?"). All items were answered using a five-point scale ("not concerned at all" to "very much concerned"). The alpha for the scale indicates high reliability ( $\alpha = .92$ ,  $N = 247$ ).

with parents being moderately concerned of possible negative effects of television on their child ( $M = 2.94$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ).

Parents' positive attitudes toward television were assessed by asking the parents six statements concerning possible positive effects of television on children's development and recreational activities, (e.g. "Television programs help children to reduce prejudices against other people"). The remaining five statements included learning important things for life due to TV, stimulation of fantasy, stimulation of children's recreational activities, increasing learning success, and provision of topics for conversation. Again, all items have been answered using a five-point scale ("do not agree at all" to "fully agree"). The scale computed out of the six items is highly reliable ( $\alpha = .80$ ,  $N = 251$ ). Parents do not have very positive opinions about effects of television on children ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ).

*Family interaction patterns* Family interaction patterns were measured by asking parents seven items concerning the manner and atmosphere of interaction between family members. Items have been adapted from the FACES III cohesion subscale of Olson, Portner, and Lavee (1987) and include openness of general interaction between family members (e.g. "Family members ask each other for help"), the importance of shared activities and children's animation for nonmedia spare time activities (e.g. "When I am at home I spend time with my child playing, doing handicrafts together, or helping with the homework"), as well as the kind of family communication (e.g. "Open discussions of current problems rarely take place in our family"). Again, all items have been answered using a five-point scale ("do not agree at all" to "fully agree"). The scale computed out of the seven items possesses sufficient reliability ( $\alpha = .72$ ,  $N = 252$ ). According to the parents, the atmosphere and interaction between family members is highly open and communicative ( $M = 4.24$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ).

*Children's viewing time* Children's viewing time was assessed to function as a control variable in analysis. Parents were asked to fill in a diary with the time and program the child watched the previous day. The diary was divided into 15 minute time slots, starting with 6 a.m. and ending with 12 p.m. The number of quarters of an hour the child watched TV was multiplied to obtain the amount of viewing time in minutes ( $M = 57$ ,  $SD = 60$ ).

## Results

Research Question 1 asked if the television mediation styles identified by Valkenburg et al. (1999) can also be identified for German-speaking Swiss parents. To answer this question, a factor analysis on all television mediation items was conducted, using principal components extraction and (as orthogonality was not assumed) oblique rotation. Excluding all items with factor loadings  $< .40$  on all factors, items with high and similar double loadings (i.e. difference of loadings  $< .20$ ), items which were not interpretable on a factor, and items which form a not interpretable factor analysis resulted in a three factor solution (see Table 1). The factors are labeled "active mediation," "restrictive mediation," and "covieving." Factor one contains all items used by Valkenburg et al. and Austin et al. (1999) for measuring active or instructive mediation respectively. Also, one of the new items concerning parental remarks about bad language loads on this factor. The new items as well as the items adopted from Austin et al. have considerably smaller factor loadings than the items adopted by Valkenburg and colleagues. The second and third factor only consists

of items used by Valkenburg et al. for measuring coviewing and restrictive mediation. Variance explained by all three factors is slightly higher than variance reported by Valkenburg et al. (58% vs. 56%). Results suggest that it was possible to replicate the factor structure identified by Valkenburg and colleagues for German-speaking Switzerland. Factor scores were constructed for each of the three mediation styles by totaling the unweighted scores on the items indexing each mediation factor. The scales possess good reliability values (see Table 2).

Research Question 2 asked for the frequency of parents applying the three mediation styles and connections between them. It is shown (see Table 2) that German-speaking Swiss parents most frequently restrict children's television viewing, followed by active mediation and coviewing. The correlation between the restrictive and active mediation scale is:  $r = .49, p < .001$ , between the active mediation scale and coviewing:  $r = .35, p < .001$ . There is no correlation between the restrictive mediation and coviewing scale.

To identify factors affecting parent use of the three mediation styles (RQ3 and H1), hierarchical multiple regressions analyses were employed, entering all variables of a block simultaneously. Sociodemographic and family factors (parents' education, parents' role model, child's age and sex, number of siblings, single parent, number of television sets in household and in the child's bedroom) were included in the first block. Because a child's viewing time may be correlated with certain styles of mediation or with parental concerns about television, child viewing time was included as control variable in the first block. Factors influencing parental behavior (concerns about negative effects of television on the child, opinions about positive effects of television on children, family interaction patterns) were entered in the second block.

The first block (sociodemographic, family factors, and child's TV viewing time) accounted for 44% of the variance in restrictive mediation,  $F(9, 238) = 22.75, p < .001$ , 14% of the variance in active mediation,  $F(9, 238) = 5.57, p < .001$ , and 5% of the variance in coviewing,  $F(9, 238) = 2.31, p < .05$ . The addition of the second block (parental attitudes toward children's use of television and family interaction patterns) resulted in a significant increase in the variance explained for each of the three mediation styles. These variables added 4% to the variance explained in restrictive mediation,  $F(12, 235) = 20.05, p < .001$ , 21% to the variance in active mediation,  $F(12, 235) = 12.06, p < .001$ , and 10% to the variance in coviewing,  $F(12, 235) = 4.53, p < .001$ .

Results demonstrate different patterns of the factors affecting the three television mediation styles (see Table 3). At a glance, the child's age and viewing time are the most important of the sociodemographic and family factors. Family interaction patterns prove to be significant for all mediation styles. Additionally, both parent concerns about negative effects of television on their child and opinions about positive effects of television on children affect television mediation. However, there are also differences.

**TABLE 2**  
Statistical values of television mediation scales

Television Mediation Scale	Number of items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Alpha</i>	<i>N</i>
Active mediation	9	3.41	0.77	.91	245
Coviewing	5	3.24	0.75	.78	247
Restrictive mediation	5	4.02	0.82	.78	249

TABLE 3  
Determinants of parental mediation

Predictor	Restrictive Mediation Beta	Active Mediation Beta	Coviewing Beta
Sociodemographic and family factors			
Parents' education <sup>a</sup>	.10*	.00	-.06
Parents' role model	-.06	-.07	-.07
Child's age	-.32***	-.06	.31***
Child's sex <sup>c</sup>	-.08	.08	-.03
Number of siblings	.03	-.02	-.06
Single parent <sup>b</sup>	-.06	-.03	.05
Number of TV sets	.01	.00	-.08
TV set child's bedroom <sup>b</sup>	-.19**	.00	.08
Child's viewing time	-.17**	-.12	-.06
Factors influencing parental behavior			
Family interaction	.20***	.32***	.21**
Negative attitudes TV	.09	.31***	.11
Positive attitudes TV	-.05	.09	.22***
R <sup>2</sup> <sub>adjusted</sub>	.48***	.35**	.15***

Note. <sup>a</sup>0 = low, 1 = high; <sup>b</sup>0 = no, 1 = yes; <sup>c</sup>0 = male, 1 = female. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

Restrictive mediation is affected most by the child's age, followed by the family's interaction patterns, the availability of a television set in the child's bedroom, and the child's viewing time. The first and the last two factors result in less restriction of children's television usage, whereas an open and communicative family interaction leads to more restriction. The same holds true for parental concerns about negative effects of television which becomes marginally significant ( $p = .06$ ). Parents' education also affects restrictive mediation in the way that more educated parents restrict children's television usage more than less educated ones. However, in comparison to other factors, the influence of parents' education is rather small.

In contrast to restrictive mediation, active mediation is affected most by the family communication style and interaction and parental concerns about negative effects of television. The more open the family communication and the more parents are concerned about negative effects of television, the more they actively mediate children's television viewing. Sociodemographic and family factors hardly influence parental explanations and discussions about television content. Only the child's viewing time shows a marginally significant negative influence on active mediation ( $p = .08$ ). However, in comparison with the influence of parental concerns and family interaction, the influence of the child's viewing time is negligible. The same is true for parental opinions about positive effects of television on children, which is marginally significant ( $p = .08$ ).

Coviewing increases with the child's age, more open family communication, and parents' positive opinions about television. The child's age shows the strongest influence, followed by positive parent attitudes toward television and family interaction patterns. The latter two factors are far less important than the first one. The effect of parental concerns about negative effects of television becomes only marginally significant ( $p = .07$ ).

In partial agreement with H1, active mediation is affected most by parental concerns about negative effects of television and family interaction patterns. Sociodemographic and family factors have virtually no effect. Contradicting H1, parents' attitudes toward television

do not influence restrictive mediation and coviewing more than the other factors taken into account. Instead, restrictive mediation is much better explained by sociodemographic and family factors. This is also demonstrated by the variance accounted for by the two blocks entered into the regression (see earlier). Though parental concerns about negative effects of television are relevant in affecting coviewing, factors such as the child's age and family interaction prove to be at least just as important. Thus, H1 only receives partial support—and only regarding active mediation.

## Discussion

Having tested a German version of scales measuring television mediation, the present study investigated television mediation in German-speaking Switzerland and factors affecting it.

Results demonstrate that the first aim of the investigation, the allocation of a standardized German-speaking measure of parents' television mediation, could be achieved. Using mainly already existing television mediation items, explorative factor analyses replicated the factorial structure identified by Valkenburg et al. (1999). Restrictive and active mediation as well as coviewing proved to be applied by German-speaking Swiss parents, too. All three scales show high reliability values, making them applicable in further investigations in German-speaking Europe. Replication of the factorial structure by Valkenburg et al. and the fact that the fifteen items adopted from them are the ones providing the highest factor loadings suggest the applicability of these fifteen items for a German-speaking short measure of television mediation styles.

Findings demonstrated that German-speaking Swiss parents frequently apply restrictive and active mediation as well as coviewing. Though parents' answers might at least partly be influenced by social desirability, results support previous findings whereupon German-speaking Swiss parents control and accompany children's television usage rather intensively (Süss, 2004). In contrast to the US and The Netherlands, in German-speaking Switzerland restrictive mediation comes in first, active mediation and coviewing only come in second and third. This suggests a more rigid handling of children's television usage by German-speaking Swiss parents. Obviously, due to strongly negative attitudes toward television (Süss, 2004) German-speaking Swiss parents show stronger concerns about and reservations against children's television usage than Dutch or US parents.

Concerning predictors of television mediation, altogether sociodemographic and family factors proved to be less important than factors influencing parental behavior. This confirms results of other investigations (Austin et al., 1997; Valkenburg et al., 1999; Warren et al., 2002). The positive effect of family interaction patterns observed with all three mediation styles indicates the particular importance of both an open and communicative family interaction as well as enhanced stimulation of the child for television mediation. The lesser influence of family structures, television equipment, and parents' education on active mediation and coviewing, and partly also on restrictive mediation, supports findings that those factors have become less important in the German-speaking part during the last years (Schorb & Theunert, 2001). The largely unverifiable influence of parents' education on television mediation, however, is astonishing. So far in German-speaking countries parents' education has been considered to be one of the most important predictors of parents' handling of television. Possibly, the missing or at least small effects of parents' education are caused by the present sample, which shows a bias toward higher education.

For the three mediation styles, different patterns of determinants have been observed. For active mediation the strong influence of parental concerns about negative effects of television and the positive correlation between active and restrictive mediation suggest that the reason for applying this mediation style can be seen in parents' efforts to protect their child. The strong influence of family interaction patterns on active mediation shows that explanations and comments about content can particularly be found with parents who care about their child. As the positive correlation between active mediation and coviewing indicates, German-speaking Swiss parents also take corrective actions during coviewing. Possibly, this correlation is explained by the fact that if parents choose a program suited for adults and the children watch this program together with their parents, parents automatically have to explain more to the children (Bybee et al., 1982). While programs aimed at children normally explain what is shown, such explanations are missing in most programs intended for adults.

Restrictive mediation is obviously different. The child's age proves most important followed by the family interaction pattern, the availability of a television set in the child's bedroom, and the child's viewing time. Taking into account that the last two factors might also be the result of missing restrictions and that there is a significant positive correlation between family interaction patterns and parental concerns about negative effects of television, this suggests that restrictive mediation, too, is used by parents to protect their child from harmful effects. However, this protection is used less for teaching children to become critical users than for insulating them from television. Again, the positive influence of family interaction patterns on restrictive mediation shows that corresponding actions are particularly important for parents who care for their child.

In this context, findings also point at problematic combinations. Regression analyses have demonstrated that heavy viewing children receive less restrictive and, to a certain degree, less active mediation than children who view less TV. Additional correlational analyses suggest that this is due to the availability of a TV set in the child's bedroom, at least regarding restrictive mediation. Having a TV set in his/her bedroom, a child might negate parental control of television usage. However, the problem is deep-rooted. According to correlational analyses children who have a TV set in their bedroom also live in households with at least two television sets and have parents who are heavier viewers and show a less open, less communicative, and less stimulating family interaction. Thus, it can be assumed that the child's higher viewing time is already the result of parents' decreased television mediation or a less stimulating and supportive family background in general (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Buerkel, 2001; Hurrelmann et al., 1996). In particular, children who do not receive corrective actions by their parents show undesired effects of televised content (e.g. Nathanson, 1999).

Against this background the value of coviewing has to be treated with reserve. This is especially true because, in the present study, positive opinions about television proved to be a better predictor of coviewing than concerns about negative effects. One reason for this might be that parents who hold positive opinions about TV also watch more TV themselves. The influence of positive opinions about television on coviewing, the fact that coviewing increases with the child's age, and a lacking correlation between coviewing and restrictive mediation suggest that coviewing is in fact the result of shared motives (Dorr et al., 1989) and not motivated by parents' efforts to protect their child. Austin (2001), therefore, suggests that coviewing should not be regarded as parental intervention, but rather as role modeling behavior.



The present investigation and the scales for measuring television mediation have several limitations. The retrieval of restrictive mediation does not take into account whether parents strategically schedule other leisure activities when certain programs are aired. Restrictive mediations thus might be slightly underestimated in the present investigation. It has not been assessed to what extent parents encourage their child to watch certain programs or watch TV at certain times. Findings indicate that parental encouragement does not reflect a simply affirmative attitude toward television, but a rather reflective and deliberate exposure to children's television usage (St. Peters, Fitch, Huston, Wright, & Eakins, 1991). A second limitation can be found in the questioning of parents. Various studies partly showed remarkable differences in parents' and children's answers concerning television mediation and family interaction patterns (Fujioka & Austin, 2003; Nathanson, 2001; Olson et al., 1987; Paulson & Sputa, 1996). Even if questioning children is more demanding than questioning adults, it is recommended to also rely on children's answers and to reinterpret the results of the present study if necessary. Strictly speaking, parents' information about television mediation reveals their motives for such behavior, children's information reveals the efficacy of parents' efforts (Fujioka & Austin, 2003; Nathanson, 2001). A third limitation, finally, concerns the general inquiry of parental concerns about negative effects of television on children and the general inquiry of parents' estimated positive effects of television on children's development and recreational activities. Depending on the program, parents may have different concerns about possibly negative effects (Cantor, Stutman, & Duran, 1996).

Parental mediation is an important research field. With the current study, a reliable German-speaking measure exists that allows for international comparisons of television mediation and also for the analysis of effects of mediation styles in German-speaking Europe. Moreover, factors identified as important for parental mediation of television in the current investigation provide an opportunity to identify starting points for necessary changes in parents' way of handling children's television usage.

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### NOTES

1. Some authors also use the notion of evaluative mediation (Bybee et al., 1982). As that form of parental behavior, which is called active mediation in the Anglo-Saxon language area, is almost similar to active behavior identified by Schorb and Theunert (2001) for Germany, throughout the rest of the article the term "active mediation" is used for explanations in general.

2. In addition to the factors examined in this article there are other factors influencing parental mediation of children's television usage, such as the self-perceived efficacy of parental mediation (Nathanson, Eveland, Park, & Paul, 2002) or a child's intelligence (Abelman, 1987). Due to limited space and since they have not been included in the present investigation, these factors are not discussed (see Buerkel-Rothfuss & Buerkel, 2001, for an overview).

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